

NORTHERN COMMUNITIES BENEFITING FROM YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE

Young people across Tasmania on Community Service Orders are helping to improve their local communities, and learning some valuable life skills along the way.

DCYFS Youth Justice Services is providing active supervision and support to young people and community based and not-for-profit organisations to undertake a range of activities in their local communities.

Young people aged between 10–17 years of age who have committed a crime may be sentenced to a Community Service Order (CSO) for a certain amount of hours. This is up to 70 hours for 13–15 year olds and up to 210 hours for young people 16 years and over.

The purpose of a CSO is to provide a clear consequence for significant or repeated offending. The focus of community service is on developing the young person's competencies through realistic and meaningful community service.

In the State's North, young people are involved in some really exciting initiatives that are delivering tangible improvements in their local communities.

At the Ravenswood Community Health Centre, Youth Justice clients have cleared an interior garden and courtyard and are currently building a new garden. The young people will also be building flower boxes for the exterior of the building, and will be responsible for painting the exterior posts of the building with multilingual "welcome" messages.

Fay Sheppard from the Ravenswood Health Centre says the young people are always polite, and clearly learn some useful life skills as part of their placements.

Fay says, "Ravenswood Community Health Centre has really benefited from the involvement of the young people who are completing Community Service Orders.

"They have put a lot of work into re-making the gardens, and also regularly mow the lawns.

"They take pride in their work, and are courteous and well mannered under the direction of their supervisor."

As part of the Youth on Paterson Cooking Program, groups of 4 young people at a time are developing life skills in the kitchen in areas such as kitchen hygiene, healthy cooking and budget cooking.



Top: A participant mows the lawns at the Northern Children's Network, Newstead

Middle: The Northern Children's Network also has new vegetable patches

Program Co-ordinator Tim Keogh says, "Youth on Paterson has worked closely with Youth Justice Services since 2008 to provide a flexible supportive approach to engage youth at risk into alternative community based activities.

"The aim of these programs is to provide young people with opportunities they may not usually have access to. Additionally the activities have encouraged personal development, team work, problem solving skills and leadership skills," Tim says.

The Northern Children's Network (NCN) hosts a team of Youth Justice clients once a week at their main site at Newstead. The young people are building gardens for children to grow plants, helping to keep the grounds neat and tidy and assisting with maintenance of the Child Care Centre.

NCN's Administrative Manager Penny North says, "As NCN is a not for profit organisation, with a large building and grounds to maintain, the support provided by these young people is much appreciated.

"We provide an environment that is supportive and helpful to their needs.

"Recently a work team helped to set up our environmental garden, and you can see the young people get real pleasure from seeing the plants growing when they visit each week."

DCYFS' Youth Justice Services is always seeking more organisations to provide suitable placements for young people. Please contact Miranda Sonners, on 6233-8508 or email miranda.sonners@dhhs.tas.gov.au to discuss the CSO program and for details of your local Youth Justice contacts.



The tidy garden at the Ravenswood Community Health Centre

What is a Community Service Order (CSO)?

CSOs are part of a range of measures for the diversion of young offenders that were introduced as part of the *Youth Justice Act 1997*. Young people carrying out community service are deprived of some recreation time without disruption to family, education or employment time. CSOs are allocated for a certain number of hours (70 hours for 13–15 year olds and up to 210 hours for young people 16 years and over) for a maximum period of 12 months. The *Youth Justice Act 1997* provides that attendance at educational, health, personal and other programs is considered also to be community service.

Where possible a CSO relates directly to the offence, providing opportunity for young people to:

- make reparation to the community for their offending behaviour;
- reinstate the property of victims;
- retain young people in the community in order to minimise disruption to their relationships, employment and education
- develop and learn new skills;
- create opportunities for the community agencies that offer placements to be involved in a positive way in the youth justice system; and
- establish relationships with community members.

The program is a mix of placements supervised by community organisations and placements supervised by Community Youth Justice. Through the CSO Program, young people have been given the opportunity of placements in a diverse range of setting such as:

- assisting volunteer groups in a variety of community projects;
- providing services to victims such as repairing vandalised homes or property;
- providing light maintenance and/or repair work, such as painting, clean-up and carpentry, for not for profit organisations or councils; and
- working with people with a disability, senior citizen groups or providing services in hospitals/care facilities.